

Kosmas Calls on VA to Alleviate Backlog in Processing Post-9/11 GI Bill Benefits Applications

Sends Letter to General Shinseki Urging Action to Expedite Claims

September 15, 2009

(Washington, D.C.) – Today, Congresswoman Suzanne Kosmas (FL-24) called on the Department of Veterans Affairs to take steps to alleviate the backlog in processing applications for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. The VA Regional Office in Atlanta, which processes applications for the State of Florida, is estimated to have a backlog of over 60,000 pending benefits claims. Kosmas sent a letter to General Eric Shinseki, U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs, urging his department to quickly conduct a review of application processing procedures in order to institute policies that will expedite the claims.

Congresswoman Kosmas has heard from numerous Central Florida veterans who are beginning classes without receiving their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. Though the VA has been working with schools to alert them to the delays and ensure that veterans are able to remain enrolled, many veterans need GI Bill benefits to help cover the cost of supplies and living expenses and could face hardships due to the delays.

“The Post-9/11 GI Bill is one way for our nation to express our sincere appreciation for the sacrifices our brave troops and their families have made by providing access to a full college education, and these bureaucratic delays are simply unacceptable,” said Congresswoman Kosmas. “We must take action quickly to ensure that Central Florida’s veterans receive the full benefits they have earned in a timely manner.”

The GI Bill for the 21st Century, which was passed by Congress and signed into law last year, provides a full, four-year college education to any veteran who has served since September 11, 2001 for at least 90 aggregate days or at least 30 days with a disability discharge. These benefits took effect on August 1st of this year.

Congresswoman Kosmas is working to ensure that Central Florida’s veterans get the support they deserve. She has formed a Veterans Advisory Council to keep her up to date on the issues that are important to Central Florida veterans, and she frequently travels across Florida’s 24th District to meet with veterans about their issues and concerns.

Additionally, Kosmas has led the fight to secure the \$371 million needed to complete construction of the new Orlando VA Medical Center, funding which passed the House earlier this year. The approval is a critical step towards completing construction of the new medical center, which will make a difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of Central Florida’s 400,000 veterans.

The full text of Congresswoman Kosmas’ letter can be found below:

Dear General Shinseki:

I am writing to express my concern about the backlog in approving applications for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. I have been informed that the Atlanta VA Regional Office has a backlog of approximately 60,000 Post 9/11 GI bill claims.

I have heard from numerous veterans in Florida's 24th Congressional District who are starting school but are still waiting for a response to their applications. Though we appreciate that the regional office has contacted schools to make them aware of the delay in tuition payments, many of my constituents are facing hardships due to the delay in benefits needed to assist with purchasing supplies and covering living expenses.

I ask that you direct the agency's Under Secretary for Benefits to quickly conduct a review of Post-9/11 GI Bill application processing in order to institute policies and procedures that will help expedite the claims process and alleviate the backlog at the VA Regional Office in Atlanta and other regional offices.

Congress and the nation recognize the sacrifices made by our brave troops and their families. The Post-9/11 GI Bill is intended to give our veterans, who have put their lives on the line in service to our country, the opportunity to receive the education needed to succeed in today's economy, and any delay impedes their ability to take the next step in their careers. Immediate action must be taken to help VA offices process Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits more quickly. Thank you for your prompt assistance in this matter, I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

SUZANNE M. KOSMAS

Member of Congress

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